

Done at Washington, DC, this 13th day of March, 2003.

**Joseph J. Jen,**

*Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### **Biscuit Fire Recovery Project, Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forests, Curry and Josephine Counties, Oregon**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

**SUMMARY:** The Forest Service, USDA, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on proposed activities in areas burned in the summer of 2002 by the Biscuit Fire. The Biscuit Fire affected almost 500,000 acres burning in the steep canyons of the Klamath/Siskiyou Mountains. It destroyed four homes, burned millions of trees, and altered habitat for various plant, wildlife, and fish species, including Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species. The fire damaged roads, trails, recreation signs and other structures. The implementation of this proposal is scheduled for fiscal years 2004 through 2009. The proposed action would be in compliance with the 1989 Siskiyou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan, which provides the overall guidance for management of this area. The Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forests invites written comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis. The agency will give notice of the full environmental analysis and decision-making process so interested and affected people may be able to participate and contribute in the final decision.

**DATES:** Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by April 18, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** Send E-Mail comments to [R6\\_biscuit@fs.fed.us](mailto:R6_biscuit@fs.fed.us) or written comments to Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forests, PO Box 520, Medford Oregon, 97501, Attn: Biscuit Fire Recovery Project.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Questions about the proposed action and EIS can be directed to: Tom Link, Biscuit Fire Recovery Project Leader, Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forests, phone: (541) 471-6500, E-Mail to: [R6\\_biscuit@fs.fed.us](mailto:R6_biscuit@fs.fed.us).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

#### **Purpose and Need for Action**

There is a need to recover merchantable timber before its value is lost to deterioration.

There is a need to restore vegetation that has been killed or altered by the Biscuit Fire. Approximately 225,000 acres have lost a significant conifer tree component, including almost 80,000 acres of Northern Spotted Owl habitat. Revegetation is needed to accelerate restoration of conditions that existed prior to fire exclusion. The objective is to restore lost habitat and provide for future timber production.

There is a need to protect the remaining late successional habitat, used by Threatened or Endangered (T&E) species, from further loss from fire and insects. The objective is to reduce the risk of future catastrophic fire that can destroy this habitat. There may also be a need to reduce the risk of insect infestation that can kill remaining healthy trees.

There is a need to protect forest users, adjacent private property values, and communities. The objective is to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and insect infestations from developing on National Forest System lands and moving onto adjacent lands.

This project will also include a number of learning opportunities that can be integrated within the proposed action. Some post fire management actions are controversial and there is uncertainty about how well some activities will achieve objectives.

**Proposed Action.** The following proposed actions are designed to provide commercial wood products, restore and protect late successional forest and meadow habitat, restore and maintain water quality, and reforest conifer stands. Actions are also designed to reduce risk to communities and private lands, and learn more about the recovery of post fire environments and the effects of post fire activities (including salvage logging).

The salvage of commercial wood products from Matrix lands is planned on approximately 7,000 acres with an estimated potential recovery of 90 mmbf. These areas will be consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Siskiyou Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan.

The protection of late successional habitat and communities is proposed by reducing fuels on about 16,000 acres (many of these acres are within Late Successional Reserves). Treatments could include cutting, yarding, piling, or burning existing hazardous fuels adjacent to remaining late successional

habitat patches (about 4,000 acres). A portion of these treatments will result in shaded fuelbreaks (approximately 12,000 acres) as described by Agee *et al.* (1999; The Use of Shaded Fuel Breaks in Landscape Fire Management; Forest Ecology and Management; 127 (2000) 55-66).

Meadow habitat treatments are proposed on about 1,000 acres. This may include removing dead trees to better maintain the meadows over time. Some historic meadows that were overgrown by trees, had those trees killed by the fire. The removal of excessive amounts of dead wood can help maintain meadow grass and forb species over time.

Reforestation of conifer stands is proposed on approximately 30,000 acres. These areas are expected to need varying levels of site preparation. Site preparation will include reducing competing vegetation by manual methods or reducing dead fuels by cutting, moving, or burning.

This proposal will analyze the probability of bark beetle outbreaks and, if indicated, consider the salvage of bug-infested green trees.

Improvement or closing of roads may be proposed to reduce the risk to water quality. Treatments could include improved drainage, erosion control designs, or decommissioning of roads that are sediment risks and not needed for management purposes.

There is an opportunity to design recovery actions to learn about the effectiveness of various methods for recovering post fire environments. These proposals can include differing reforestation techniques, fuels treatments, or salvage harvesting methods, as well as, comparing natural recovery processes to more active methods. These proposals may be incorporated into project alternatives.

The proposed action considers treatments (not including salvage logging) of 2,000 acres in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA's). The goal of treatments is to reduce ladder fuels and concentrations of hazardous fuels around key areas of remaining habitat for T&E species and to improve fuelbreaks adjacent to communities. These treatments could reduce the likelihood of uncharacteristic wildfire effects (**Federal Register**/Vol. 66, No. 9, January 12, 2001). This activity will be consistent with the Interim Directive 1920-2001-1, which limits activities in IRA's. Implementation of this directive is under the authority of the Forest Supervisor.

A portion of the proposed action may analyze and recommend activities on federal lands under the administration